It’s May, which means Hudson City School District leaders just adopted a proposed spending plan for the next school year. The 2021-22 budget proposal will go before district voters next Tuesday, May 18, 2021. The goal of this column is to help you be an informed voter.

The HCSD Board of Education adopted a $52,244,404 spending plan for the 2021-22 school year on April 20. It has a 1.35% increase in the tax levy, which is below the District’s maximum allowable increase of 1.56% calculated under the state’s property tax cap law.

This is the fifth year in a row that HCSD saves taxpayer dollars by proposing a budget with a tax levy increase below the tax cap. The goal of every budget is to give our students the best possible education while being fiscally responsible for our taxpayers.

Some may wonder why districts still plan to levy taxes from property owners even though they are slated to receive federal stimulus funds on top of state aid. The answer is simple: long-term financial planning and fiscal responsibility.

It is a best practice to keep the tax levy close to the tax cap each year so that a future tax spike can be avoided. If HCSD decided to greatly reduce the tax levy based on a one-time influx of federal funds, it would negatively impact the 2022-23 tax cap since the calculation is based on the actual taxes levied in the previous year. HCSD does not want to be in a position where it must ask for more than the tax cap to offset expenses and “make ends meet” in the years to come.

HCSD plans to use the federal funds for immediate needs related to the pandemic. One example is a robust K-12 summer school program to address the learning loss experienced by many students after their academic progress was abruptly halted last spring. This funding will help provide quality instruction as well as summer transportation that is typically unavailable.

The 2021-22 proposed budget would preserve academic programs, educational opportunities, and health and safety measures. There would be no cuts to staff, however some positions were reduced through retirements and will not be filled to help save costs.
Other ways HCSD strives to reduce costs include taking advantage of available grants and savings opportunities to enhance educational programs without affecting the general budget. A recent example is our new PK-5 comprehensive reading program that was purchased with partial funding from an HRBT Foundation grant.

The budget would maintain programs that foster college- and career-readiness throughout the district as well as invest in strengthening our Information Technology Department.

Over the last few years, the security and stability of the District's network have been areas of focus. The proposal includes increased IT funding to further improve network security and infrastructure. Examples include replacing aging servers and increasing storage devices.

To offset some IT costs, HCSD plans to use federal E-Rate funds for eligible services and equipment related to telecommunications and internet access. HCSD stands to save 85% on eligible items such as network switches, cables and backup batteries (discounts typically range from 20-90% depending on the poverty and urban/rural status within a district).

Investing in our network and equipment is essential to supporting student instruction and daily operations. The proposed budget would replace hundreds of Chromebooks used by students and staff. Many devices currently in use are six to seven years old and considered to be beyond their "useful life," which is three to five years. Newer Chromebooks provide better learning opportunities with features such as touchscreens and faster, more efficient processing.

Be an informed voter and visit www.hudsoncsd.org/budget to learn more about the budget proposal and how to vote. Also look for a newsletter that will be mailed to all HCSD residents. In addition to the budget proposal, voters will be asked to elect three candidates (one incumbent) to the Board of Education. Remember to cast your vote next Tuesday, May 18 from 12 to 9 p.m. at your designated polling location.

This column by Dr. Maria Lagana Suttmeier, Superintendent of Schools, appeared in the Register-Star newspaper on Tuesday, May 11, 2021.